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THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS IN SHAKSPERE'S ENGLAND

"How chances it they travel?" inquires Hamlet, when "the tragedians of the city" are announced. "Their *residence*, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways."¹ Shakspeare's testimony as to the inferior rewards open to the players "on the road" has had many an echo since, for then as now the reputation and profit of the great metropolitan centers of dramatic activity—the Bankside and the Blackfriars, Broadway and the Strand—have been the goal of "the quality" and the subject matter of students of dramatic history. And yet the humbler Elizabethan actors who travelled "softly on the hoof"² through the length and breadth of merry England contributed no small share to the making of the national drama which remains one of the glories of their spacious times.

Many an interesting record has come down to us of the good-humored but irresponsible strolling players who were content to

travel with pumps full of gravel
Made of all such running leather
That once in a week new masters we seeke
And never can hold together.³

It is more important to bear in mind that many of the great tragedians of the city trod the boards in country towns frequently and

¹ *Hamlet*, II, 2, 352.

² *Vox Graculi*; see Collier, *Annals*, ed. 1831, III, 310.

³ *Histrion-Mastix* (1599), II, 251.

profitably. Among them were such distinguished actors as Henslowe's son-in-law, Edward Alleyn, and his colleagues, Singer and Towne,¹ and Shakspeare's friends and fellow actors, Thomas Pope, Augustine Phillips, William Kemp, and John Hemings, business manager of the Shakspeare-Burbage forces.² And there is every reason to believe that Shakspeare played with his company in the provinces, even though his name has not yet been found in the town records. Singer and Kemp, whose names do appear, tried their hand as playwrights as well as in acting. I have shown elsewhere that a very large number of Elizabethan playwrights—Ben Jonson, Heywood, Nathaniel Field, Richard Brome, to mention only a few of the leading names—were recruited from the ranks of the actors.³ These actor-playwrights profited magnificently by their opportunity of viewing the life of their time in the large, of examining with equally open eyes the hucksters of Bartholomew Fair and the rustic philosophers of Stratford and Gloucestershire.

And yet the curiously interesting circumstances and conditions of the provincial drama have been neglected or ignored by most students of the period. Miss Gildersleeve, for example, fails to include in her "hierarchy of dramatic rulers"—the Privy Council, the Lord Chamberlain, and the King⁴—an almost equally important element: "Mr. Mayor" and the town councils. Many valuable compilations of the dramatic records of various towns and localities have been produced, but nothing approaching a synthetic study of the extant materials has yet appeared. The most valuable contribution of recent times in this field is John T. Murray's compilation of materials in the second volume of his *English Dramatic Companies* (1910), and his earlier article based on some of these materials.⁵ This article, however, was written before he had completed his investigation, and its conclusions were necessarily, as Murray says, "more or less tentative." His later collections and

¹ *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. Greg, I, 4 and 6.

² Halliwell-Phillips, *Illustrations*, p. 33.

³ See chapter 6 of my MS dissertation, *Finance and Business Management of the Elizabethan Theatre*, Harvard University, 1918.

⁴ *Government Regulation of the Elizabethan Drama*, p. 19.

⁵ See *Modern Philology*, II (1905), 539-59. Murray's book on the subject, promised some time since, has not yet appeared.

additional materials which I have gathered from other sources make available much information not hitherto accessible to the general student. It is the purpose of this article to present in short compass some of the conclusions derivable from these materials.

We may begin with a glance at the strollers and vagabonds of Elizabethan drama. These players were frequently made the butt of contemporary jibes, and it appears that they paced the open road humbly enough. One of the earliest extant records of them, an entry from the exchequer accounts of Henry VII, suggests something of their low estate. In the year 1493 the King gave largesse of 6s. 8d. "to the players that begged by the way."¹ Nor did the strollers of the next century fare much better, if we may believe Thomas Dekker. The poet of *The Gentle Craft* did not always deal gently with the misfortunes of his fellows, and yet his picture of their indigent condition makes good contemporary evidence. In his *Belman of London* (1608), Dekker takes a fling at certain "Players . . . who, out of an ambition to weare the Best Ierkin (in a Strowling Company) or to Act Great Parts forsake the stately Cittie Stages to trauel upon ye hard hoofe from village to village for chees and buttermilke."² Again, in his *Newes from Hell* (1606), he transcribes a leaf from Charon's account book: "Item, lent to a Companie of country players, being nine in number, one sharer & the rest Iorneymen that with strowling were brought to deaths door, XIIId. ob., upon their stocke of apparell, to pay for their boat hire, because they would trie if they could be suffred to play in the diuels name."³ The last phrase of the passage obviously refers to the Statute of 1572, by which unlicensed players were threatened with branding as "rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars."⁴ It is interesting to note further that Dekker's nondescript company of nine, "one sharer & the rest Iorneymen," is paralleled by other evidence, later and more specific. Richard Bradshawe, one-time servant of Gabriel Spencer, the actor who enjoyed the distinction of being killed by Ben Jonson,⁵ forsook the city stages

¹ Malone's *Shakspeare*, ed. Boswell, III, 43.

² Grosart's *Dekker*, III, 81.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 146.

⁴ Gildersleeve, *op. cit.*, p. 27; Thorndike, *Shakespeare's Theatre*, p. 204.

⁵ *Henslowe's Diary*, II, 243, 313.

sometime before 1633. In that year his company of seven was arrested at Banbury because its license was believed to be fraudulent, and all its members testify that Bradshawe alone was "master," the rest being apprenticed to serve him for seven years for "nothing but meat and drink."¹ And yet even the more soundly constituted companies—organizations that boasted full complements of "sharers"²—were sometimes in almost as heavy case as Dekker's hopeless crew. Pembroke's Men, for example, travelled happily into the provinces in 1593, only to be stranded on the road and forced to pawn their properties.³

The passage from *Histrion-Mastix* quoted above points at one of the difficulties experienced by the strollers—that of "holding together." Even the best of the London companies—Shakspeare's among them—had to use elaborate safeguards to keep their members from seeking all too frequent changes of scene.⁴ The road companies, having fewer advantages to offer, must have found this problem much more difficult to solve, and their managers were frequently embarrassed by the tardiness or disappearance of actors entrusted with important parts. The lateness of Bottom the Weaver, and the non-appearance of one of the important actors in the play of *Sir Thomas More*⁵ probably had many a counterpart on provincial stages.

Nor were the absent members always to blame, for sometimes their non-appearance was brought about by causes beyond their control. The strollers, even if they avoided the letter of the statute against masterless men, were ready victims for the recruiting officer's press gang. "Press money!" exclaims a sadly surprised player in *Histrion-Mastix*, "alas, sir, press me? I am no fit actor for the action!" But the recruiting officer is not to be denied. "Text-bills," he insists, "must now be turned to iron-bills."⁶ The licenses of the great London companies specifically protected them from

¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 163.

² I.e., actors who had graduated from the "hireling" or apprentice stage and had become investors in the capital of their company and sharers in its profits.

³ Collier, *Memoirs of Edward Alleyn*, p. 32; Murray, *E.D.C.*, I, 65.

⁴ Compare chapter 2 of my dissertation.

⁵ *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, IV, 2; *Sir Thomas More*, IV, 1.

⁶ Act V.

interference of this sort,¹ but their humbler brethren had no recourse except to suit the word even to this sort of action. Again, the strollers were subject to retributive justice—or malice—dispensed by petty local functionaries whose officiousness they delighted to ridicule in their plays. Justice Clack, in Brome's *Jovial Crew* (1641), cools his wrath at the players and illustrates our point. "They can act Justices, can they?" he suggests; "I'll act a Justice among 'em: that is to say, I will do justice upon them."²

In fairness to Justice Clack and his kind we are obliged to add that certain elements among the strollers were a sore burden to the constituted authorities. Beggary was not the sole offense of the strollers. The actors in *Histrion-Mastix* describe a rival company as an aggregation of "coney catchers that cousen mayors,"³ and the merry crew of "comedians, tragi-comedians, comi-tragedians, pastorists, humorists, satirists," who hold forth in Middleton's *Mayor of Queenborough* (ca. 1602), meet the description to a nicety. They throw flour into Mr. Mayor's eyes and, having stolen his purse, leave His Honor to derive such comfort as he can from his clerk's explanation: "You are cozened, Sir; they are all professed cheaters. . . . They only take the name of country comedians to abuse simple people with a printed play or two which they bought at Canterbury for sixpence."⁴ Similar exploits enacted by other "roguish players" might be recounted,⁵ but we must leave the strollers here to look into the affairs of the companies that had more reputation and profit to lose.

We have seen that the names of some of the most distinguished Elizabethan actors appear in the provincial records. It is safe to add that without the resource of going into the country when acting in London was unprofitable or impossible, even the best of the city companies could hardly have survived. The conditions which periodically forced the players to travel are well known, and a rapid summary will suffice to recall them to the reader. The

¹ See my dissertation, chapter 5.

² V, 1.

³ Act V.

⁴ V, 1. Cf. Percy Simpson, *Shakespeare's England*, II, 240.

⁵ See T. S. Graves, *Modern Philology*, IX, 431, on the famous *England's Joy* episode at the Swan Theatre in 1602, and compare pp. 507-8, below, on a similar exploit ascribed to Peele.

ravages of the plague again and again led to an inhibition of acting in the metropolis, and brought about a steady exodus of actors, sometimes for periods of many months in successive years.¹ The closing of part or all of the London theatres at times when the Puritan opposition was able to dominate the situation led to the same result, as did also the very frequent occurrence of theater fires in London.² Another driving force was the keen competition among the companies in London—such competition, for example, as that between the children's companies and the adult actors to which Shakspeare alludes in *Hamlet*.³ More important, perhaps, was the sharp rivalry for public favor among the adult companies themselves.⁴

Nor was competition eliminated when the players left the city. Managers anxious to steal a march upon their rivals were none too scrupulous in their methods. Certain playwrights also—Robert Greene and perhaps Thomas Dekker among them, if contemporary allusions may be trusted—were sometimes guilty of sharp practice. A familiar passage from *The Defense of Conny Catching* (1592) would seem to indicate that on one occasion Greene profited by the synchronous absence of copyright protection and of a certain company with which he had had business relations:

Aske the Queens Players if you solde them not *Orlando Furioso* for twenty Nobles and when they were in the country sold the same play to the Lord Admirals men for as much more? Was not this plaine Conny-catching, Maister R. G.?⁵

Somewhat later the Admiral's Men may have been concerned in a similar transaction, in which Thomas Dekker and Shakspeare's company also appear as principals. On January 30, 1599, Henslowe significantly records a loan of 3*l.* 10*s.* to the Admiral's Men "to descarge Thomas dickers from the a reaste of my lord chamberlens men."⁶

A more serious abuse than the stealing of plays, however, was the stealing or forging of licenses. A notable dispute at Leicester

¹ See Fleay's *Stage*, and Murray, *E.D.C.*, I, 155, etc.

² Fires at the Globe, the Fortune, the Rose, and the Blackfriars are recorded.

³ II, 2, 361.

⁴ See my dissertation, chapter 6.

⁵ See Grosart's *Greene*, XI, 75.

⁶ *Henslowe's Diary*, I, 101.

in 1583, between Worcester's Men and those of Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, may serve as a case in point. Tilney's Men reached the mayor first, and were permitted to play. The other company received a gratuity of 10s., and orders to leave the town. Thereupon they marched "with drum & Trumppytts thorowe the Towne in contempt of Mr. Mayor," and then calmly put on their play, Mr. Mayor to the contrary notwithstanding. By way of excuse for their action Worcester's Men urged that their rivals "were not lawfully aucthorized & that they had taken from them there comyssion." Tilney's company categorically denied the charge, but the Mayor settled the controversy by accepting the apology of Worcester's Men and authorizing them to stay on.¹ Whatever the merits of this particular case may have been, it is clear that many similar irregularities occurred. Their causes are not far to seek. After 1581 each and every company was required by law to obtain a license from the Master of the Revels, and that official made heavy demands upon the financial resources of the players, his fees being limited only by his judgment of what the market would bear.² Bartholomew Jones, one of the witnesses in the Bradshawe case at Danbury in 1633, testifies that "the Master of the Revels will give allowance to the raising [of the license] if he be paid,"³ so that the trouble there seems to have resulted only from the manager's inability to pay the five or ten pounds which were probably required.⁴ By 1633, however, licenses were not to be had freely, even though the applicants were able to pay. In that year witnesses stated that the Bradshawe license had been sold in turn to at least three different managers, and that Bradshawe "gave 20s. in earnest for this commission, and was to pay either 10*l.* or 20*l.*"⁵ It must be remembered that in order to gain legal standing, a company besides paying its license fee had to find some nobleman willing to lend it his name or "countenance."

¹ Kelly, *Notices of the Drama at Leicester*, p. 213.

² See my dissertation, chapter 6, section 4.

³ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 164; Collier, *Annals*, II, 48-49. "Raising" means "renewal."

⁴ If we may judge from the rates charged the city companies. The sum in question (between \$200 and \$400 in our money, allowance being made for the greater purchasing power of Elizabethan money) was no small item for those days and circumstances.

⁵ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 165.

Minor companies doubtless experienced difficulty in finding such patrons. At all events, more or less illegitimate trading in players' licenses had come to be a considerable annoyance to the authorities at least ten years before the Bradshawe case, for in 1622 we find Pembroke, the Lord Chamberlain, writing to provincial officials to forbid transactions whereby irresponsible companies, for "whome such grants & lycences were nevr. intended are suffered to have free passage."¹ The stealing of plays and licenses was symptomatic of the keen competition among the travelling players. Some allowance for the sharp practice then in vogue may well be made, however, in view of the fact that the players had not only to compete with rivals of their own "quality," but also with hordes of jugglers, exhibitors of puppet-shows, dancers, sleight-of-hand artists, and miscellaneous performers of all kinds. And there were other difficulties.

It was formerly believed that the Puritan opposition was not serious in the provinces,² but the contrary is true. The documents prove beyond a doubt that many towns made holiday when the players came, and supported them in something of the same spirit that still finds expression in the receptions accorded to Chautauqua organizations in our own rural districts. But the documents prove just as clearly that from about 1600 to the closing of the theaters in 1642 the Puritan opposition in the provinces as well as in London became increasingly troublesome. Indeed, certain notoriously puritanical towns had come to be bywords among the players even in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Banbury, the scene of Bradshawe's troubles, was so prominent an offender that Ben Jonson in *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) freely labels Zeal-of-the-Land Busy "a Banbury man." Later in the play, when the elder feels called upon to rehearse all the stock arguments against tolerance for the players, the poet scathingly enlarges upon Busy's "Banbury vapours."³ The University of Cambridge, as early as 1592, protested to the Privy Council because certain players, in defiance of

¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 351-52.

² Murray (*Modern Philology*, II, 557) held this view, and took sharp exception to Courthope's position in this connection (*History of English Poetry*, IV, 391).

³ V, 3.

orders prohibiting their appearance within five miles of the University, "sett vp their bills" upon the very gates of the colleges.¹ In 1604 the Duke of Lenox wrote to "all maiors and Justices of the peas" to urge forbearance of opposition to his "servants . . . in the exercise of their plays,"² but in that very year the town of Cambridge once more forbade all plays, in order to put a stop to the corruption of manners "in the younger sort."³ Exeter in 1618 took similar action on the ground that "those who spend their money on plays are ordinarily very poor people,"⁴ and so did Norwich in 1623, "by reason of the want of worke for the poor & in respect of the contagion feared and for many other causes."⁵ In short, it is clear that such towns as Exeter, Dover, Barnstaple, Canterbury, and Plymouth, which until about 1610 had supported visiting players with numerous grants from their town funds, practically closed their doors to them thereafter. In some cases, however, the towns were still willing to pay them gratuities "for putting them off," that is, "for not suffering them to play"⁶—in short, to speed them on their way elsewhere with a fee meant to express the town's respect for the patron who had lent his name to the players: "for their L. and Mr. his sake," as a Norwich entry has it.⁷ Barnstaple between 1618 and 1637 allowed but two companies to play, whereas eleven companies were bought off "to ridd the Towne of them." Dover after 1610 made payment for but two town plays, though it records thirty-five gratuities "upon benevolence . . . to dept. the cittie & not to play," and Canterbury took much the same action.⁸ Many towns remained open to the players until the close of our period, but the evidence here cited certainly indicates that in its later decades the Puritan opposition

¹ *Malone Society Collections*, I, 2, 191–202. Both universities, of course, furnished dramatic entertainment from time to time to Elizabeth and her successors, but the authorities did not take kindly to the professional players until Restoration times. Cf. *Mal. Soc. Coll.*, I, 3, 247, and W. J. Lawrence, *Elizabethan Playhouse*, II, 192.

² Warner, *Cat. Dulwich Coll. MSS.*, p. 27.

³ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 220 ff.

⁴ Collier, I, 369; Fleay, *op. cit.*, pp. 310–21; Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 6, 253–54.

⁵ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 347.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 270, 258.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 25, 337.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 197–200, 258–67, 221–34.

made the struggle for existence much severer for the travelling companies than it had been.

These were the decades also when they felt most strongly the competition of showmen not connected with the legitimate drama. In some of the town records the payments to the regular companies are almost entirely crowded out by rewards granted to manipulators of "Italian motions" or puppet-shows—the "movies" of Elizabethan times—and to miscellaneous tricksters and jugglers. The Coventry records for the years 1624 to 1642 are particularly illuminating in this connection. During these years the town allowed payment for many interesting entertainments on the occasion of the first appearance of the artists in question. Thus it granted 3s. 4d. to one Richard Thompson, "who had a commission to play the Worlds wonder," and 12s. to three performers "who had a motion to shew expressing the worlds abuses." Still better fared Christopher Thomson, who "came with Commission to shew the Creation of the world" and won an official reward of 13s. 4d. "Walter Neare that went about to show a child borne without armes," and "a soldier that tossed a Pike at the Crosse before Mr. Maior and his Bretheren," made a less favorable impression and got but 2s. 6d. and 18d., respectively. Other performers did better. "An Italian that thrust himself under the side to make experiment of his oyle," Bartholomew Cloys "for shewing a musical organ with divers strang and rare motions," and "one John Shepheard . . . who came wth. commission to shew a sow with 6 hoggs," drew five or six shillings each, whereas during the same years the town repeatedly paid but two or three shillings by way of reward for official first performances by regular dramatic companies. Between 1636 and 1642 Coventry made thirteen payments to tricksters such as the gentleman with the sow and hogs and divers other strange and rare motions, and but ten payments for legitimate plays.¹

The actors, however, were quick to respond to the demands of their public, and soon began to appear with certain "special" or "added" attractions of their own. Thus "the Kings Players

¹ For the materials quoted see Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 235-54, and II, 340 for similar items at Norwich.

and hocus pocus" arrived in Coventry in 1638 (the year of Mr. Richard Thompson and the World's Wonder, and but one year before John Shepherd and his hogs) and the King's Men and their assisting artist led all the rest, for the town fathers gave them a reward of 20s.¹ Meanwhile the players "of the Earle of Essex & the Turk"—without question another redoubtable tumbler or juggler—had earned a fee of 40s. elsewhere.² From Marlowe to Shakspeare and Jonson, the playwrights rebelled at the low conceits which clownage keeps in pay—the antics of the clowns and buffoons which the astonishing elasticity of Elizabethan taste applauded and supported almost as liberally as it did its Tamberlaines, its Alchemists, and its Hamlets. It was left for Ben Jonson to express most clearly the playwrights' objection to the growing taste for jugglery and buffoonery which signalized the period of the decline. "Do they think this pen can juggle?" inquires Damn-Play in *The Magnetic Lady* (1632); "I would we had Hokos-pokos for 'em, then, or Travitanto Tudesco."³

The players learned to meet in still another way the difficulties created by the ever increasing competition for the favor of the public. We have seen what happened when Worcester's Men and Tilney's simultaneously claimed the plaudits and the shillings of the city of Worcester in 1583. Later companies realized that co-operation may at times be more profitable than competition and court proceedings. They hit upon the simple expedient of joining forces, doubtless with an eye to the advertising value of an arrangement which may have been forced upon them by sheer necessity. Such arrangements had, indeed, high precedent in their favor. Thus the two leading companies of London, the Admiral's Men and the Chamberlain's Men, are known to have played together before Queen Elizabeth in 1586.⁴ From the records of Newcastle-on-Tyne we learn that its town fathers enjoyed a similar distinction not long after, for in 1593 they granted the sum of 30s. "to my Lord Admiralls plaiers and my Lord Morleis plaiers being all in one

¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 253.

² *Ibid.*, I, 313.

³ I, 1. Tudesco was a famous Italian juggler. For another allusion to Hokos-pokos, see *The Staple of News*, II, f.

⁴ Halliwell-Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

company.”¹ So too when on March 20, 1616, trouble threatened between the advance agents of Queen Anne’s Men and the representatives of “the Prince’s servants,” who came on the same day to book their companies with the authorities of Norwich, the matter was compromised, “and theise two companys” together were given “leave to play fflower days this next weke.”² Other cases of this sort are on record, but sufficient evidence has been cited to establish our general point—that competition was keen, that the players had at times to face sharp rivalry from non-legitimate performers and strong opposition from the authorities, but that, on the whole, they learned to adapt themselves to the situation. It remains to examine the evidence concerning the expenses and the income of the provincial companies, their methods of financing their trips, and the manner of their reception by the towns they visited.

Since the provinces had no playhouses properly speaking, the travelling players were not required to find money for the building and upkeep of theaters, as were their London colleagues.³ Like them, however, their sharers had to provide capital for the expenses of production—costuming, playwrights’ fees, lighting, the wages of the inferior actors or “hirelings”—and for travelling expenses. We have already seen that in such humble organizations as that of Bradshawe the whole burden rested upon the single manager and owner, who likewise appropriated any profit that might be earned. *Henslowe’s Diary* indicates clearly, however, that when the stronger companies went on tour their actor-sharers raised money toward the company equipment fund much as they sometimes did on preparing for a London season. On May 3, 1593, Henslowe notes that his nephew, Francis Henslowe, borrowed from him the sum of 15*l*. “for *his share* to the Quenes players when they broke & went into the contrey.”⁴ Two years later came a loan of 9*l*. “for *his halfe share* with the company wch. he dothe play wth.”⁵ and still a third entry, probably of the year 1604, shows Henslowe lending his

¹ See Richard Welford, 10 *Notes & Queries*, XII, 222.

² Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 340.

³ For a full discussion of London playhouse and company finance see chapters 2 and 6 of my dissertation.

⁴ *Diary*, I, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 6.

nephew 7*l.* to "goyn wth. owld Garland & symcockes & sauery when they played in the duckes nam at ther last goinge owt."¹ This entry does not necessarily indicate that only Garland, Simcock, and Savery were young Henslowe's fellow-sharers when the Duke's Men went on tour in 1604. We shall see in a moment that respectable travelling companies averaged some six or eight full sharers. Since Francis Henslowe borrowed 15*l.* and 9*l.* for his "share" and "half-share" respectively, it would follow that the travelling companies of which he was a member started with a capital of 100 to 150*l.* or its equivalent in properties. From other sources it appears that a single share in the stock of Worcester's Men, a travelling company in 1589, sold for 37*l.* 10*s.*²—in other words, that the total stock of that company was probably worth some 200*l.* Provincial playgoers in their own degree were as fond of gorgeous costume and expensive show as the gallants and groundlings of the metropolis.³ Moreover, the cost of Elizabethan theatrical apparel was so high⁴ that a capital of 100 to 200*l.* would have been none too much to provide the necessary equipment and to leave a working reserve for travelling expenses. "Our companie is greate," complain the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1592, "and thearbie *our chardge intollerable in travellinge the countrie*, and the contynuanee therof wilbe a meane to bring us to division and separation."⁵

Not the least difficult of the problems to be faced by the managers of the travelling companies must have been that of limiting expenses by keeping down the number of actors. Their plays required such large casts—Shakspere's, for example, averaging twenty-five speaking parts—that it must have been difficult to draw the line between the conflicting demands of the stage and business managers. Murray puts the usual number of actors in a travelling company of any importance at about ten or eleven,⁶ and this estimate will serve as well as any that could be reached. It

¹ *Ibid.*, I, 160; II, 267.

² Collier, *Memoirs of Edward Alleyn*, p. 4. Cf. *Henslowe's Diary*, II, 130.

³ See *Malone Soc. Coll.*, I, 247-59; Dibdin, *Annals of the Edinburgh Stage*, pp. 8-9; Collier, *Annals*, I, 9; Kelly, *Notices of the Drama at Leicester*, pp. 19, 24, 61. On silk robes used by travelling players, see quotation from Peele's *Jests*, below, p. 508.

⁴ See chapter 6 of my dissertation.

⁵ Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Murray, *E.D.C.*, I, 88; II, 127-28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 88.

may be worth while, however, to give some indication of the evidence on the subject. The earliest companies, naturally, were the smallest, unless we except the obscure strollers of later times. Thus we learn from the Household Book of Lord Howard, afterward Duke of Norfolk, that this nobleman "on Crystemas daye [1482] gaff to *IIII* players of my Lord Gloucestres" the sum of 3s. 4d.,¹ and the strollers who entertain More and Erasmus in *Sir Thomas More* (ca. 1599) manage with "Foure men and a boy."² An equal economy of means is practiced by Sir Oliver Owlet's Men in *Histrion-Mastix*. Sir Oliver's Men number "but four or five"—whereby, as the poet Posthaste remarks, "they are the liker to thrive."³

Posthaste to the contrary notwithstanding, the town records prove that the more thriving companies had larger resources in man power, though the number of actors varies from town to town and from year to year. "My lorde Sussexse players, *being VI men*," appeared at Ludlow in 1570,⁴ and the travelling license of the Chamberlain's Men for 1593 enumerates seven performers, though the list is probably incomplete.⁵ Worcester's Men at Norwich in 1583 had at least ten "Players & servants," and "the lady Elizabeth's Players" at Plymouth in 1618 employed the respectable number of "20 persons, wch. had the King's hand for playing as well by night as by day."⁶ Other entries place the number of actors at 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, and 18, respectively,⁷ and the average lies between 10 and 12. We may add that the Lady Elizabeth's Company of twenty probably included six or eight hirelings, whose demands upon the company treasury would have been moderate even if they received something more than bread and meat by way of remuneration. Henslowe once more helps us here, for Edward Alleyn's transcript of one of his father-in-law's entries shows that in at least one case a hireling expressly agreed to accept, while playing in the country, one-half of his London wages of 10s. a week.⁸

¹ Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

² IV, 1, 53.

³ I, 1, 154.

⁴ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 324.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 88; Halliwell-Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁶ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 336, 385.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 333, 103, 254-55.

⁸ Henslowe agreed to give William Kendall (Dec. 8, 1597) "everi week of his playing in london Xs, & in ye cuntrie Vs" (*Diary*, I, XLIX).

Our materials make possible a somewhat more definite view of the income than of the expenses of the provincial companies. We shall see that in spite of the "intollerable chardge" they had to meet, when conditions were favorable their sharers had something to look forward to besides the "chees and buttermilke" at which Dekker scornfully put their part in the gains.¹

The evidence, in fact, proves conclusively that the players frequently enjoyed much more substantial cheer, and with it certainly more comfort than fell to the lot of Dekker in his all too frequent sojourns in the prisons of London. "Wine & chirries," "junkets & bankets," "dynner wth beere & bysketts" and "musyck" and much good "sacke"—such items appear with pleasing regularity in the expense accounts of the town fathers who provided the players with these sound refreshments at the public charge "to welcome them to towne" or to wish them God-speed with "a breakfaste at their depture."; all this perhaps after making additional provision for the purchase of certain "loads of coal" and "links for lights"—"to keep the actors warm"—and properly illuminated, one is tempted to add, in case the sack ran short.² The custom is worth something more than passing notice. These "juncquets with Mr. Mair and his brotherne"³ did not in themselves perhaps represent a large credit item on the books of the company business manager, but they speak eloquently of the hearty reception accorded the players in normal times. Possibly these feasts did not provide for more than an occasional change from Dekker's "chees and buttermilke," and yet they came often enough to win the notice of still another redoubtable commentator upon the life of the times. Ben Jonson has Cokes in *Bartholomew Fair* score a point for the puppets, the actors of the "Italian motions," over "the great players": "I like 'em for that . . . there goes not so much charge to the feasting of them, or making them drunk, as to the other, by reason of their littleness."⁴

¹ See above, p. 491.

² See Dibdin, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Richard Welford, 10 *Notes & Queries*, XII, 222; Watts, *Theatrical Bristol*, p. 4; G. D. Rendel, *Newcastle-on-Tyne*, p. 10; and Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 259, 380, 392, 362, 365, 324, 228-31, etc. Murray (*Modern Philology*, II, 548) notes that the towns "sometimes" paid for the players' ale or wine, but does not indicate that the practice was widespread and well established.

³ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 220.

⁴ V, 3.

The drinkings and banquetings, moreover, made but a part of the substantial advantages derived by the players from the public receptions given them by the towns they visited. Many years ago Malone called attention to the fact that the town fathers regularly attended the opening performance in state, and rewarded the actors from the public funds. The documents bearing on this point have been repeatedly discussed,¹ but they may be made to yield more information than has yet appeared. Malone's quotation from R. Willis' *Mount Tabor* (1659) deserves repetition here:

In the city of Gloucester the manner is (as I think it is in other like corporations) that when players of enterludes come to towne, they first attend the Mayor, to enforme him what nobleman's servants they are, and so to get license to play their first play before himself and the Aldermen and Common Counsell of the city, *and that is called the Mayor's play: where everyone that will comes in without money, the Mayor giving the players a reward as he thinks fit to shew respect unto them.*²

The passage is indispensable—but not altogether trustworthy, nor does it tell the whole story. It may well be supplemented by an entry from the Leicester records of the year 1553, which indicates that Mr. Mayor and the aldermen did not always stand upon ceremony, but on at least one occasion were quite ready to honor the players at a moment's notice, even though they had to sacrifice an official dinner of good vension upon the altar of Thalia or Melpomene. In that year the Council made allowance "for the expences that went to the buck that my lady of Huntynghton gave to the XLVIII,³ which was ordeyned at the hall for the Company & they cam not because of the play that was in the Church."⁴

It is well to bear in mind the advertising value of these public receptions and official first performances over and above the rewards in pounds, shillings, and pence. Indeed, a further word on theatrical advertising in the country may be in order before we seek to estimate the earnings of the players from official grants and popular "gatherings."

¹ Cf. Murray, *Modern Philology*, II, 539-59.

² Malone, *op. cit.*, III, 28.

³ I.e., the town council.

⁴ Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

I have already referred to the custom of sending advance agents to make the necessary arrangements, and to that of posting bills to advertise plays.¹ A more spectacular part of the Elizabethan publicity man's work was to arrange for circus processions through the towns to announce the presence of the players. Many a hireling in his time "led the drum before the English comedians"² in their travels through provincial England, sometimes against the wishes of the authorities. We have seen that in 1583 Worcester's Men went with drum and trumpet through the town of Leicester in defiance of its mayor,³ and there is evidence of the same sort of high-handed procedure in Dover and even in London itself.⁴ The advertising methods of the travelling company in *Histrion-Mastix* are of particular interest because, in this case the instrumentalists of the company are not the only ones called upon to trumpet forth the quality of its wares. The players have just arrived in the market-place of a small town, where a crowd is gathered to bargain for country produce. One of the actors "steppes on the crosse and cryes 'A Play.'" He then illustrates our point and enables us to pass from the consideration of advertising methods to the counting of the gains, as follows:

All they that can sing and say
Come to the Towne-house and see a play,
At three o'clock it shall beginne—
The finest play that ere was seene;
Yet there is one thing more in my mind:
*Take heed you leave not your purses behind.*⁵

The last line of this passage indicates that a first performance—a "town-play," as it is called in *Histrion-Mastix*—with all its official sanction and reward was not necessarily a performance "where everyone that will comes in without money," as the *Mount Tabor* passage has it. That it was sometimes free to the public appears from such records as those of Newcastle-on-Tyne for the year 1593,

¹ See above, pp. 500 and 497, and cf. W. J. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, II, 55.

² *All's Well That Ends Well*, IV, 3, 244. Maurice Jonas, *Shakespeare and the Stage*, p. 233, states that this passage "puzzled" him, but its significance is obvious after all.

³ See above, p. 495.

⁴ Cf. Halliwell-Phillips, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–32; Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 342; and chapter 3 of my dissertation.

⁵ Act II.

when the town granted 3*l.* to Sussex's Men "in full paymente for *playing a free play*."¹ On the other hand, Murray has justly called attention to several entries covering official payments at Leicester which distinctly state that these were "over and above that was gathered" from the public at the doors.² And there is other evidence to the same effect.³ We shall try to determine in a moment just what amounts the players derived from these town fees and public gatherings. Meanwhile we must note that Murray's attempt to decide this point on the basis of the Leicester entries for 1590 leads to unacceptable conclusions. One of these entries reads as follows: "Received of John Underwood, the Mayor's Sergeant, which was by him received of the *Mayors Brethren*⁴ for 6 plays and one Bear Baiting—44*s.*" From this and certain other entries Murray infers that such items as the 44*s.* represent the *public gathering* over and above the town fee, and he concludes that the average takings at the door "seem to have been about 7*s.*," while the official rewards "vary from 10*s.* to 40*s.*"⁵ It is difficult to believe that the players could have managed with such small average takings as 7*s.*, for we must bear in mind that the extra town fee was paid only for the first performance. Moreover, a highly advertised first performance must have drawn at least as large a public gathering as any that might be expected at subsequent plays, so that if we are to accept Murray's interpretation of these entries it would follow that a 7*s.* house was the best the players might expect at any time. But this interpretation is not valid. Murray for the moment overlooked the Leicester ordinance of 1566, which provided that "everyone of the *Mayors brethren* and of the forty-eight, being required to be [at the town play] shall bear everyone of them his portion." This ordinance was passed because "the town stock has been much decayed by giving of great gifts."⁶ Later council orders reiterated the provision that the aldermen must raise the town reward from their own pockets, and other towns took the

¹ See Richard Welford, 10 *Notes & Queries*, XII, 222.

² See *Modern Philology*, II, 547, and Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 194, 227.

³ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 202.

⁴ The italics are mine.

⁵ *Mod. Phil.*, II, 553-54.

⁶ Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

same action.¹ There can be no doubt that the entries Murray has mistaken for the totals of the public gatherings, represent merely certain contributions of "the mayor's brethren" toward the town fee. The town officials had no interest in the public gatherings, and their records throw no light upon that part of the players' income.

A passage from *Ratseis Ghost* (1606), a pamphlet celebrating the adventures of the redoubtable Gamaliell Ratsey, highwayman, does contribute certain information on this subject. Ratsey, we are told, fell in one day with a travelling company—"heard their play and seemed to like that . . . and verie liberally . . . gave them *fortie shillings*, with which they held themselves richly satisfied, for they scarce had *twentie shilling audience* . . . for a play in the countrey."² Ratsey, to be sure, immediately after relieved the players of their 40s. and also forced them to make him "a desperate tender of their stock," yet it is comforting to reflect upon the margin of difference between their usual 20s. receipts and the seven of Murray's estimate. Indeed a gathering of 40s. was probably by no means beyond the ken of the players. One of the *Jests* of George Peele (1607) may serve for further testimony on this point. According to the story, Peele had stayed in Bristol "somewhat longer than his coin would last him," his hard-hearted landlord thereupon attaching the poet's horse for security. A fortunate turn of circumstance enabled Peele and his Pegasus to beat a strategic but very successful retreat:

It so fortun'd that certain players came to the town . . . to whom George Peele was well known, being in that time an excellent poet. . . . There were not past three of the company come . . . the rest were behind . . . so that night they could not enact, which George hearing had presently a stratagem in his head. . . . He goes directly to the Mayor, tells him he . . . had a certain history of *The Knight of the Rhodes*, desiring the mayor that he with his presence . . . would grace his labours. The mayor agreed to it . . . but for himself he could not be there being in the evening, but . . . very liberally gave him an angel. . . . About his business [Peele] goes . . . hired the players' apparel to flourish out his show, promising to pay them liberally, and withal desired them they would favor him so much as to gather him his money at the door . . . George in the meantime, with the ten shillings he had of the

¹ Bridgenorth did, for example. See Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 206.

² Halliwell-Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Mayor, delivered his horse out of Purgatory. . . . By this time the audience were come *and some forty shillings gathered*, which money George put in his purse, and, putting on one of the players silk robes after the trumpet had sounded thrice *down stairs goes he*, gets to his horse, and so with forty shillings to London: leaves the players to answer it.¹

Even a gathering of 40s. was only about a quarter of the average takings at the London playhouses,² and the probabilities are that the travelling companies occasionally drew much more.³ The records of Bristol, the scene of Peele's fabled exploit, prove, at any rate, that they sometimes succeeded very well indeed in their efforts to attract a full audience. In 1576 the town paid 5s. 1d. for repairing the guildhall door and replacing "the cramp of yren weh was stretched wth. the press of people at the play of my Lord Chamberleyns survts before Mr. Mayor and thaldermen."⁴ Again, though travelling charges may have been "intollerable," the cost of living was much lower in the country than in London.⁵ We shall see presently, moreover, that the travelling players frequently doubled their earnings by giving two performances a day. And they had no playhouse charges to meet, for the town-hall, or sometimes the church, was to be had gratis. Queen Anne's warrant to her players in 1605 specifically commands all officers of towns and municipalities to "affourd them your Townehalls" or other suitable quarters for acting, "that they may be in better readiness for our service,"⁶ and the licenses of the King's and the Prince's Men call for the same privilege.⁷ Some of the towns objected to the custom. Chester, for example, in 1615, took exception to "the common scandall of late incurred by admittinge of Stage Plaiers to act their obscene and unlawful plays in the comon hall of the Citie, thereby convertinge the same, beinge

¹ See Bullen's *Peele*, II, 389; Watts, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

² See my article on "Shakspere's Income," *Studies in Philology*, XV, 89.

³ A play produced in Malden, Essex, brought total receipts of over 7l. in 1540 (A. Clark, *10 Notes & Queries*, VII, 182). See also Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 388, on average receipts of 2l. 16s. at St. Ives, Cornwall.

⁴ Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁵ On comparative costs and wages see the extensive materials in Nichols' *Progresses* (Elizabeth and James) and cf. Feuillerat, *Revels Documents, Elizabeth*, p. 257; Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 214.

⁶ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 400.

⁷ *Malone Soc. Coll.*, I, 268-69, 281.

appointed . . . for the judicial hearing . . . of criminal offenses, into a stage for players and receptacle for idle persons."¹ Southampton and Worcester likewise objected,² and Mayor Simon of Queenborough, whom we have met earlier in this paper, was also of the opposition party. The players have asked his permission to give the usual official performance. "In the town-hall?" he queries; "'tis ten to one I never grant them that. . . . If my house will not serve their turn I would fain see the proudest he lend them a barn."³ Most of the towns, however, did not object at all. The communities which delighted to entertain the players with good ale and wine and substantial dinners felt no hardship in welcoming them to their town-halls. At worst, when the business of the town pre-empted its hall, most of them probably followed the example of Coventry and Leicester and allowed the players special grants to cover their expenditure in providing quarters elsewhere.⁴

Our summary of the evidence concerning the size of the public gatherings, and the non-chargeable item of playing facilities brings us back to the question of the receipts from official fees at first performances. The town treasurers scrupulously record the amounts they expended for this purpose, and we are not compelled to seek our information in out-of-the-way places, as in the case of the unofficial but really much more important item of public gatherings. We have seen that the gifts of the city of Leicester, about 1590, ranged from 10s. to 40s. Naturally, as one surveys the whole of the provincial accounts, a much larger variation appears. The lowest payments on record are two of 4*d.* each—the rewards of the town of Gloucester to Sir Andrew Fortescue's Players in 1560, and of Plymouth to Lord Mounteagle's Men in 1575.⁵ Other small fees, of 11*d.*, 2*s.*, 3*s.* 4*d.*, 5*s.*, and 6*s.* 8*d.*, are recorded,⁶ but as a rule

¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 235.

² *Ibid.*, II, 395, 409.

³ *The Mayor of Queenborough*, V, 1.

⁴ See Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 254, and Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 226. It is interesting to note that the town-hall of Leicester was used for the presentation of plays until 1722, when a statutory prohibition put an end to the custom (Kelly, p. 273).

⁵ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 276–86, 383.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 200–205, 196, 197, 220, 256, 273. Murray, who collected much of this material, doubted the authenticity of an entry for the payment of 3*s.* to Lord Willoughby's Men at Coventry in 1612. He believed this sum too "niggardly" to be accurate, but the weight of his own evidence throws this view absolutely out of court. See Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 75.

these payments either came comparatively early in our period or went to companies of small repute. The great majority of the town rewards ranged from 10s. to 2*l*.¹ At the other end of the scale we find such towns as Newcastle-on-Tyne, Plymouth, Norwich, Worcester, and Coventry, occasionally granting the large² fees of 3*l*., 3*l*. 6s., and even 4*l*.³ One of the Bristol entries indicates that this town on one occasion allowed a definite amount for each actor in the company which entertained the council. In the year 1581 the treasurer paid Lord Oxford's Men "being i man and ix boys at iis. a piece the sum of xxs.,"⁴ but this rather blind method of fixing the reward of artistic endeavor does not appear elsewhere in the records. Both Collier and Kelly believed that the town rewards to the players were minutely graded according to the rank and prestige of their patrons.⁵ Murray qualifies this view by noting that the records show no particular differentiation between the payments to companies patronized by the greater and the lesser nobles, but he follows Kelly to the extent of holding that "those companies patronized by royalty and one or two of the more famous noblemen always received the greatest amount."⁶ This was generally but not "always" the case. I find, for example, that the reward of the King's Men at Coventry in November, 1627, was but 2s. 6*d*., whereas the same town fifty-two years earlier had paid Warwick's Men, an organization of much less prestige, the sum of 30s.⁷ Again, the accounts of Smithills, Lancashire, for 1612 record a payment of 50s. to Lord Mouteagle's Players, the same company which had drawn but 4*d*. from Plymouth some years earlier.⁸ Smithills, further, paid Strafford's Men 40s. in 1612, and but 3s. 4*d*. when they returned five years later, and Doncaster, which had granted Leicester's Men 20s. for a performance in 1574, gave but 10s. to the King's

¹ See the records of Dover, Bristol, Doncaster, Worcester, York, or any of the towns, in Murray's collections, *E.D.C.*, II, and compare Kelly, Watts, and other collections of extracts from the town records.

² See above, p. 495, note 4.

³ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 335, 358, 380, 412-13, 235.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 215.

⁵ Collier, *Annals*, I, 84; Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-27.

⁶ *Modern Philology*, II, 553.

⁷ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 235 ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 220.

Men in 1633.¹ As a rule the companies under the patronage of the royal family or the great nobles fared best, but the evidence indicates that many of the towns practiced a refreshing eclecticism in apportioning their rewards—that on occasion at least they paid most liberally the companies whose acting pleased them most, irrespective of their patrons. The evidence indicates also that town fees increased gradually in the course of our period, and that in the ordinary course of events local prosperity or hard times were reflected in the rewards granted the players.

A word may be added concerning the gratuities often paid by the towns when for one reason or another they did not permit the players to "enact."² The amounts cover about the same range as the payments for official first performances. Thus "Lord Dakers his Players who did not playe" at Leicester in 1592 received 5s., "the King's Players who played not" drew 20s. there in 1621, and in the same year Queen Anne's Men were bought off with a gratuity of 30s.³ The records of Leicester contain thirty-seven entries for the payment of similar gratuities, but the players were not always to be bought off. In 1585, for instance, Norwich refused Essex's Men permission to act "for fear of . . . infecccon," but "for their L. and Mr. his sake" allowed them a gratuity of 26s. 8d. The actors pocketed the money—and then calmly proceeded to play at the inn. The city fathers thereupon solemnly voted to withhold all future rewards from the culprits, only to prove a little later that they knew how to forgive and forget. Within four years the offending company received another reward of 20s. by order of the mayor.⁴ Curiously enough, the gratuities paid "for sending them out of the city" were sometimes larger than the fees for the official performances. Barnstaple, for example, allowed the Prince's Men 40s. "for not playing" in 1621, and only 30s. for a town play the next year.⁵ Certain of the poorer companies seem to have been quite content to pocket their gratuities and to go on their way rejoicing.

¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 256.

² See above, p. 497.

³ Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 226, 255.

⁴ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 336-37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 199. See also II, 341-42, etc., for gratuities of 2l., 3l. 6s., etc.

The Norwich records of 1614 make mention of certain players who, "being demaunded wherefore their comeinge was, sayd they came not to ask leave to play But to aske the gratuetie of the Cytty."¹ Even substantial gratuities, however, could have offered but small compensation to the better companies for the loss of the takings of an extended stay. Indeed the records show that several companies absolutely refused to accept the gratuities offered them. Instead, on the strength of their licenses they defied the authorities and "enacted."²

Another matter deserves attention here—the number of performances the companies gave on an average visit,³ and this involves the question of evening performances. Murray noted that the players sometimes gave their entertainment in the evening, but he believed that "their usual time of performance was in the afternoon, as in London."⁴ The weight of the evidence indicates, however, not only that evening performances were the rule rather than the exception, but that the companies often played twice a day. Pembroke's Men at Norwich, for example, in the year 1598, got "lycens to use their facultie *two days and two nights* and not to use the same after nyne of the clock on either night." In 1610 this town allowed the Queen's Men to stay for one week on condition that they keep the Sabbath "nor [give] *more then one play a day*."⁵ Again, the Plymouth records for 1618 testify that the Lady Elizabeth's Men "had the King's hand for playing *as well by night as by day*,"⁶ and Richard Heton's draft for his patent as governor of the Queen's Men in 1635 provides for the same privilege. Heton stipulates that his company when in the country shall be free to perform "at all tyme or tymes (the tyme of Divine Service only excepted) *before or after supper*. . . ."⁷ Many of the towns objected strongly to the

¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 339.

² *Ibid.*, II, 347, 356.

³ Murray (*Modern Philology*, II, 555) states that he was unable to determine "how long a company would remain in a town" and "how many performances it would give . . . as the town records deal almost exclusively with the single performance in which the . . . authorities were financially interested." His later documents, and others, answer the question.

⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 551.

⁵ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 337-39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 385.

⁷ Cunningham, *Shakspeare Soc. Papers*, IV, 99.

disturbances which frequently accompanied evening performances. "Consideringe . . . the many disorders which by reason of plaies acted in the night time doe oftentime happen"—more particularly the rioting of apprentices—the town of Chester in 1615 felt obliged to forbid acting after six o'clock at night.¹ It is interesting to note that Canterbury, which in 1636 complained that its citizens were unable to "restrain their servants from being at the plays till near Midnight," some sixty years earlier had gone so far as to allow certain companies extra money to pay for "candells & torches . . . at the play."² Such allowances were made from time to time also at Dover, Newcastle, and Bristol.³ In short, it is clear that the custom of giving evening performances—or, in many cases, two a day—was very well established indeed.⁴

Some of our citations have touched not only upon the matter of double performances but also upon the length of the company's stay for any one visit. Considerable additional information on this point is available. We know, for example, that the companies occasionally played at great private houses for but one or two performances,⁵ that the Norwich authorities in 1587 paid Leicester's Men 40s. on condition that "they play not above II times," and that the Queen's Men in 1600 successfully petitioned for leave to play there four days, whereas Huntington's Men and Hertford's were allowed three days each in the same town that year, the Lady Elizabeth's three days in 1617, and the Duke's Men eight days in 1614.⁶ The 1618 patent of the Queen's Men authorized them to "play in any one place [not] above fourteen days together."⁷ Twenty-three years earlier Canterbury had passed an ordinance which allowed but two performances to any one company, no company to visit the town more than once a month.⁸ Restrictive measures of this sort sometimes caused trouble. When the Lady

¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 235.

² *Ibid.*, I, 275; II, 222, 227; cf. *Cal. State Papers*, 1636.

³ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 261, 335, 214.

⁴ Cf. T. S. Graves, *Studies in Philology*, XIV, 103.

⁵ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 296.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 337–40, 344–45.

⁷ Collier, *Annals*, I, 413, note.

⁸ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 233.

Elizabeth's Men came to Norwich in March, 1617, with the king's authority to play for fourteen days in any one town, the city fathers demurred, for this company had been in town earlier that year. They compromised by giving the players "one whole weke & no longer . . . and they pmise . . . not to come agayne duringe this whole yeare."¹ Our evidence warrants the conclusion that the average stay of the companies was three or four days, though occasional visits lasted for a week or even two weeks, and that many of the companies played twice on each day of their stay.

But one question remains to be dealt with. How many plays and companies did the provincial towns of England see in the course of a year? Once more the records may be permitted to speak for themselves. Bath paid for at least four town plays each year from 1577 to 1598—that is to say, its citizens probably had the opportunity to see fifteen or twenty plays a year during this period.² From 1590 to the close of Queen Elizabeth's reign in 1603 Leicester was visited by four, five, or even six companies each season, and an average of four companies came during the reign of King James.³ Coventry paid for 304 official first performances between 1574 and 1642, distributing its largesse to some five different companies each year, with not a single year missing. And Stratford-on-Avon in 1587, about the time of Shakspeare's arrival in London, was entertained by four different companies.⁴ The list might be extended indefinitely. No additional figures or illustrations are needed, however, to show how great a hold the drama had upon the provinces, nor to drive home the fact that from them the players and their playwrights derived a very substantial part of the support that enabled them to live in their own day, and so, in the last analysis, for all time.

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¹ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 345.

² *Ibid.*, II, 200 ff. The calculations and summaries are my own.

³ See Kelly, *op. cit.*

⁴ Murray, *E.D.C.*, II, 235, 402.